



## EBOLA AFFECTED CHILDREN-KEY ISSUES

- The Ebola outbreak in Sierra Leone since July 2014 has weakened family networks, in some cases wiping out entire families leaving behind vulnerable children, in particular infants, without living relatives to take them in. Hundreds of children are in interim care centers and foster care awaiting reunification with no long-term decisions on their future; while others have become street children or forced to earn income as primary caregivers of their households.
- Hundreds of children have been found unaccompanied or separated from their families due to death of parents or due to abandonment are left to fend for themselves. This situation presents increased vulnerability and potential risks of neglect and/or exploitation of these children
- Children orphaned by Ebola are in need of specialized attention and support. Many have suffered severe trauma experiencing firsthand the loss of a loved one to Ebola, and in some cases surviving the disease only to find out their entire family has died. Additionally, many children endured being stigmatized and shunned by their communities.

## KEY MESSAGES

1. Sustainable, quality care arrangements are required for orphans to ensure a stable environment that prioritizes the child's right to education and other basic services that are crucial to their long-term development and growth
2. Strengthening of existing surveillance systems to improve the identification and reunification of children separated from their caregivers preventing potential risks
3. Extended monitoring and follow-up are required for children returned to family relations or placed in temporary foster care to ensure children are properly care for and suspected cases of abuse or exploitation from caregivers are quickly addressed
4. Ongoing psychosocial support, which takes into consideration the psychological, social, spiritual and cultural needs of the child is required for children, caregivers and community networks to ensure affected children have the support they need for their development and remain deeply connected to their communities.

## Ebola Affected Children-Situation Overview

The effects of the Ebola outbreak on children in Sierra Leone have been devastating. As of 11<sup>th</sup> February 2015, the Family Tracing and Reunification (FTR) network have identified **16,554** children as being directly affected by the Ebola crisis (8,308 girls and 8,246 boys), with **8,360** children having lost one or both parents to Ebola and **679** unaccompanied or separated from their caregiver. Additionally, **9,668** Ebola-affected children have been provided with psychosocial support.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> All statistics are from UNICEF Situation Report. Registered orphans as of Feb 8 data



### EAC context continued....

Although new Ebola cases may be on the decline in Sierra Leone, the number of children impacted by Ebola is expected to increase over the next few months as the death toll continues to increase.<sup>2</sup>

The Ebola outbreak has created new as well as exacerbated existing vulnerabilities for children in Sierra Leone. This is particularly the case for children who have lost one or both parents to the disease.

At the onset of the disease, key concerns included:

- Weakening of social networks – where extended families would normally stepped up to care and protect orphans, the fear of contracting the virus discouraged many from taking in Ebola orphans, which then exposed children to further ills, like rejection and stigmatisation.<sup>3</sup>
- Increase in the number of children that were separated from their parents who sent them away to extended families outside of affected areas, to safeguard them from being infected.
- Many children continue to suffer from severe stress and grief after witnessing their loved one(s) die and in some cases they realise they are now left to face the future alone.
- School closures have created additional child protection risks for children such as increased child labor, sexual assault and teen pregnancy.<sup>4</sup>

### NATIONAL RESPONSE (NERC)

The National Ebola Response Consortium established a 6<sup>th</sup> Pillar<sup>5</sup> that focuses on child protection, psychosocial support & social mobilization. This pillar is currently being led by MSWGCA in collaboration with UNICEF and other local and international NGOs. The Family, Tracing and Reunification (FTR) network was also instituted to raise awareness, provide psychosocial support and temporary care while simultaneously reintegrating children with extended family members temporarily (for those that have lost their parents or relatives).<sup>6</sup> The highest priority of the FTR network has been to reunite children with extended family networks in accordance with the international Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children<sup>7</sup>. Institution care has been considered as a last resort.

Whilst we recognize that the implementation of a national strategy goes a long way in addressing the immediate situation for Ebola affected children, the effects of the Ebola outbreak in West Africa is unlikely to disappear along with the last trace of the disease.<sup>8</sup> Subsequently, EngAyde believes it is imperative that immediate priority is given as a collective effort, to the long-term plans to ensure a safe and better future for Sierra Leone's Ebola affected children.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://news.yahoo.com/fears-over-abandoned-ebola-orphans-allayed-unicef-135429229.html>

<sup>3</sup> <http://blogs.unicef.org/2014/10/01/ebola-and-its-devastating-impact-on-children/>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.irinnews.org/report/101090/sex-crimes-up-amid-ebola-outbreak-in-sierra-leone>

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.unicef.org/appeals/files/UNICEF\\_Sierra\\_Leone\\_Ebola\\_Weekly\\_Update\\_27July2014.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/appeals/files/UNICEF_Sierra_Leone_Ebola_Weekly_Update_27July2014.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.mswgca.gov.sl/Ebola/index.html>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.irinnews.org/report/100858/ebola-orphans-now-face-stigma-stress>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/14/world/africa/an-ebola-orphans-plea-in-africa-do-you-want-me.html?src=me&r=2>



## 'OURVILLAGEOURCHILDREN' CAMPAIGN

EngAyde is committed to advocating for, connecting and influencing decisions and actions that will lead to the long term care, protections and psychosocial support for Ebola affected children post Ebola.

Our current 'OurvillageOurchildren' campaign is a 5 part advocacy and fundraising awareness campaign, aimed at inspiring and mobilizing the Sierra Leonean diaspora to take action to support the long term protection and welfare of Ebola Orphans.

The campaign aims to see Sierra Leoneans taking direct action or working in partnership with key stakeholders, (such as UK INGOs and government institutions) working towards similar goals for Ebola affected children in Sierra Leone.

Our campaign strategy was informed by the findings from a survey we conducted in December 2014, amongst 139 Sierra Leoneans based in the diaspora, some of whom are currently actively engaged in addressing the Ebola crisis.

## KEY ASKS

### 1. Permanent, sustainable care for children

- Ebola has weakened the traditional extended family networks; and in some cases, Ebola has wiped out entire families leaving child survivors with limited or no extended family members to take responsibility for their care. Interim care facilities were established as a last resort to provide temporary care and support with hopes that children will eventually reunite with extended families willing to take them in. Although families have recently shown a willingness to care and protect children orphaned by Ebola, these families are overburdened and may have difficulty in the long-term supporting another dependent.

**EngAyde is advocating for long-term, sustainable care arrangements for children orphaned by Ebola to prevent further disruption in their lives and ensure their future welfare and basic necessities, like education, food, etc., are met.**

### 2. Extended child protection for children

- An increasing number of children are being separated from their caregivers due to the death of one or both their parents to Ebola. Majority of these children have been rejected by their communities due to paranoia and fear of the disease. Children without parental care are most vulnerable to stigmatization, neglect, and in some cases exploitation by care givers or support gatekeepers.

**EngAyde is advocating for strengthening of existing surveillance system of unaccompanied children as well as extended follow-up and monitoring of Ebola orphans placed with family relations or foster care to ensure their safety and protection**

### 3. Ongoing psychosocial support for children

- Children have really been stigmatized by Ebola. Some have witnessed their parents undergo extreme suffering and die from Ebola. Others have been infected and survived the disease only to face the world alone. And at a critical time in their lives when they are in need of comfort and support; they are faced with rejection and exclusion from their communities.

**EngAyde is advocating for more resources to be provided to maintain long-term psychosocial support for children and their caregivers to ensure their mental, psychical and social needs are met and that they stay connected to their society.**